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COME FORWARD

Come Forward

ROBERT D. ABRAHAMS



NEW YORK

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TO MY STAR
(*Which is the Earth*)

“Come forward O my soul, and let the rest
retire.”

WALT WHITMAN

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COME FORWARD

"TO YOU, IF YOU BE YOUNG"

Ambition is a God I never worshipped;
He that is Lord of youth I have not sought;
Anciency and wisdom have I bowed to;
Peace and what the learned old ones taught;
These are what my true young fire bought.

And yet if you're a fool and rush at windmills,
Climbing dunghills for mountains, still I say,
Rather Quixote riding on to somewhere
Than I, contented in my strength to stay,
Rooted and rotted in the ancient way.

AFTERNOON

When fire burns too high and soon,
How long can timber last?
Why must there come an afternoon
Because gay morning passed?

Oh, come not, two and twenty,
Lest one and twenty die,
And all my youth and plenty
Too fleeting pass me by.

Oh, come not two and twenty
That leads to three and four,
When man is old, content, he
Has never manhood more.

For long and long I'll be a man
And love—and learn to lie,
And hope and slay and talk and plan—
—And win—and atrophy.

Today is lovely, but I hold
My crystal, Youth, within my hands;
Too well tomorrow's tale is told,
Oh, cursèd he that understands!

CONQUEST

Because my eyes are fixed lovingly upon the sun,
And blinded I stumble here on the dark, fierce earth;
I am not lost, no, nor ashamed nor defeated.
If I am wounded with too much of brilliance,
If strength has seized my eyes and torn them free,
Holding them forever in black pawn:
That was a conquest, for I never feared to look.

LANDSCAPE: CHANSON CHINOISE

Outside my house a single tree grows;
Through my green meadows a single stream flows;
Inside my heart a single love glows,
Beautifully shining.

And if the tree dies, the fruit must die also;
And if the stream dries, green grass will not grow;
And if my love dies, my soul too must go,
Shrivelled and withered.

EDICATION, FROM THE SPANISH OF ARMANDO
A. MIRANDA

My muse disdained to walk in stolen glory;
Wrapped in another's greatness would not rise.
Hers were the wings on which she sought the skies
And with her voice she told her own new story.
The honeyed nectar that she drank to dream
Was from her own true garden. At her breast
A dahlia and a rose together pressed,
When, like the soil, she bathed in Spain's old stream.
If preferences she had, I knew them not.
If gay she sang a cloud, if sad a cypress,
Spoke of Life and Science and forgot
Her beauty, dreamed of Youth and Love the less.
No longer will she chant these abstract things;
Now to a rose, now to thy lips she sings.

WHY JONES IS AN ATHEIST

When he was ten years old, he worshipped God.

When he was twenty, he worshipped God,

While God Number One sold him tickets for the Police-
man's Hop.

When he was thirty, he worshipped God,

While Number Two ran away with a dancing teacher
from Harrisburg.

When he was forty, he worshipped God,

While Number Three was destroyed when the Bank in
which he had a savings account failed.

When he was fifty, he worshipped God,

Until Junior (Number Four) raped the iceman's daughter
and was thrown out of college and ran away to sea.

MIRRORS

Mirrors are subtle.

The eyes of the gods (if there are gods,
And there are if I say there are, and there are not if I say
there are not)

The eyes of the gods are mirrors.

Unthinking, merciless and sleek;

Falsely honest in distorting truth so blandly,

Reflecting everything except what matters.

RHYMES FOR AN ALMANAC

Who in continual fire apes the sun,
Must lose with evening what at day has won.
Who in cold, distant splendor mocks the moon,
His charm is halved and quartered all too soon.
Who'd follow breezes, as the clouds are tossed,
Must weep his tears as they do and be lost.
Who'd be the lightning, and as quickly fly,
May be as swift, but must as quickly die.

SONG OF A PURPOSE

He lived to hold,
One bright thing dear;
It was his goal;
He lived in keeping it.

He lived to mold,
One bitter tear;
It was his soul;
He died in weeping it.

HERE TODAY

Once I heard a preacher pounding and sounding from his pulpit,

“Brothers and Sisters—Brothers and Sisters”—reducing it all to one enormous family—

“Divorces, abortions, murders and stealings not permitted—

Virgin births allowed once a millennium.”

Much of what he said I lost because he bleated,

But one thing that he said I still remember,—

“Here today and gone tomorrow”—that was what I heard the preacher say,

And the first part of that sentence is *worth* remembering.

"THREE IN A FIERY FURNACE"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Three in a fiery furnace,
And only faith for a shield;
But what a mighty weapon
The dying flames revealed.

Two in a fiery furnace,
With only love for a cloak;
But what a thrilling voice cried out
Beneath the shrouding smoke.

One in a fiery furnace
And only truth for his guide;
But the man-built fire around him
Bowed to his flame and died.

All in the fiery furnace,
With only ashes sought;
What iron there is molded;
What weapons there are wrought.

MOTHER

Thy soul is like a quiet rill, that glides
Between green banks, down through a mirrored wood;
Reflecting all things beautiful and fine,
And making all their verdant beauties thine.
Calm, serene, it flows as rivers should
That unaffected are by storms and tides.

My soul is like the rushing brook that scrawls
Its mark upon the rocks which bar its path.
No calm reflection here, but bitter strife
And warfare of an elemental life.
The water of that stream in furious wrath
Down from the heights to marshy valley falls.

But though thy soul doth flow far, far above,
May not the distance conquered be by love?

SONG OF THE LONELY CHALLENGE

I

Alone I wander through the deep of Time
Where black and close its oceans wall me in,
I search the solemn mystery to win
From past the secrets of the host sublime.
What did those others dream, those early ones,
Back in the murk of some forgotten day?
And did they pause at end of strength and say
Their steps had ended, point the way for sons
To take their journey, follow it for long
To farther penetrate the unexplored
Vast sea of nothingness that round them roared;
And did their sons too pledge with voices strong,
A little farther in the dark to go,
To seek the light some later man could know?

II

If that they did I pledge them, and I swear
To take the road where they have laid them down:
A little farther I shall wander down,
The track they started. I shall walk long where
Have echoed voices of no men before.
Through blackest darkness on and on to go,
Through damp and rolling chaos wander slow
To add to their march one step forward more.
Perhaps some far off man who is to come,

Will reach the journey's end and find the light.
Oh, grant that when 'tis found 'tis clean and bright
And worth the struggle and the labor's sum.
For in this single glow one man will seize
The golden prize of all the centuries.

BALLAD OF YOUTH AND A GARDEN

"It portis iubare exorto delecta iuventus."

—VIRGIL—

Youth, seated in an apple tree,
Gazed long about and well;
Saw far off lands of mystery,
And reached for them—and fell.

Youth rose from off the rooty ground
And climbed above once more,
And ate an apple, red and round,
But threw away the core.

(From out the core there grew a tree
For other youths to climb;
But that is off our subject—we
Must wait some better time.)

Said Youth, "I've eaten of the fruit,
I'll wander now and see
Those golden roads, that pretty route
I saw from out the tree."

So down its trunk he slipped with ease,
And left the tree behind
And merry walked before the breeze,
His golden way to find.

He opened up the gate that barred
The garden from the road,
And with a youth's gay disregard,
Out from the walls he strode.

He found his way, but found it dross
Not like the path he'd seen.
This not the happy dream he'd built,
Back in that garden green.

Youth said, "I fear I've lost my way,
'Tis not the road I thought,
I'll eat more magic fruit today—"
Again the tree he sought.

Oh, long he knocked upon the gate,
His cries they filled the air;
He could not swing its mighty weight;
He could not enter there.

He could not reach the apple tree,
But saw it from outside,
And longed for food, and starved—and we
Regret to say—he died!

The moral—When you wander late
To seek your golden road,
Be sure before you shut the gate
That locks you from the fold,

That you have made no grave mistake,
And, listen—though you mock it:
If I were you, I'd surely take
An apple in my pocket!

SONG OF PROGRESS

Build on,
Build on and on,
And after that the fields of grass, green
and spreading everywhere.

ON READING BYRON'S *ODE TO NAPOLEON*
BONAPARTE

Ah, Byron, could you see the world you said
Had learned its lesson from an earlier sway;
How tyrants still do rant and prance and say
Their well learned prattle, use their power dread;
The manhood of a world poured out to free
Its rulers of one foolish master, bold
Enough to use those tactics old
Which first were made as aids to tyranny;
Could you but see the ghost of Empire walk
The same bare path it often paced before,
A road that leads through hells of woe and gore
To castle gardens, where past emperors stalk,—
Then would you find that since the world began
He who would be God must not be man.

TO ALL ARTISTS EVERYWHERE, AND TO ALL WHO
STAND READY

You call yourself a realist, perhaps;
Write, sing, paint realistically; tell of what you see, touch,
hear, smell, taste.

Perhaps you think yourself a romanticist;
Scribble, bawl, splotch romantically, tell of what you
dream, vision, desire, prophesy, imagine.

Well, I call you a Man.

For you have a body, and no soul that I can see, and a soul
that I cannot see.

And men are what are wanted for our purpose, yours and
mine.

And I care not if you are one thing or the other, if you
mean it.

Listen, you children of drabness,

And you, too, you sons of the dreamers,

I care not if you play at visions or photography,

If you work in easily rubbed out pencil, spattering pen, or
clattering typewriter;

If your medium is clay, or bronze, or the strong firm
tissue of life;

(And you a chiseler cutting life with the bloody knife of
existence),

If you sing in a cracked, old voice

Or play on a jew's harp;

Symphonist or Radio Red—Hot Mamma;

None of that matters to me or matters to you either if you
only knew it.

All that matters, all that it is written that I should tell you
is this:

Your weapons, your song, your instrument, your life,
(And mine also, but this is harder for me to understand,
being human)

All these are and then are forgotten and should be, and
nothing remains of your tool or your art.

Nothing at all remains except a something.

Something you made unknowing, that was you.

THE DRUID RING AT KESWICK—EVENING

Loud was the evening,
Noisy the song,
Silent the Druid Ring,
Silent and strong.

Noisy the song
That the shaggy wind howled,
Crying an agèd dirge,
Roaring and proud.

Silent the Druid Ring,
Silent and cold
Gone are the mighty priests,
Perished the bold.

Silent and strong,
While the wild night wind cried,
Patient the Ring and true—
Waiting—the tide.

SONG OF PLAIN MEN

"Now he belongs to the Ages"

Not to the ages,
Not to the sages,
Only to us.
History shall never
Enshroud him, forever
His soul shall be ours
And the flame that devours
His heart and his feeling
Was made for revealing
Only to us—only to us.

Not to the nations—
Feeble creations!
Only to us.
The mighty shall never
Possess him, forever
The deep burning smart
Of the truth in his heart,
Like a torch shall be flaming,
Exclaiming, declaiming,
Only to us, only to us.

REQUIESCAT

At morning, by the oceanside,
We played together on the sand;
You and I were brave and lovely,
You and I had hand in hand.

And we were gay and merry ever,
Too happy were we to be wise;
Too happy for morality,
Believing all each other's lies.

At evening, by the oceanside,
I mourn alone, alone and cold;
Calm and honest now I am,
Alas, but now I'm old, am old.

What heart has age for loving,
Age with its whitened head?
What heart have I for weeping,
When you, my love, are dead?

Tomorrow, by the oceanside,
The waves will roll upon the shore,
And lovers play upon the sand,
But two I know will nevermore.

LAKE IN THE WILDERNESS

I love it all, the beauty of the sky,
The lovely lake that glistens at the touch
Of Master Fire, sparkling with as much
Of glory as the golden sun on high.
The stark, straight tree, unbending as a God,
That habit makes to stand so solemn there;
The lush, green trail, the stilly places where
The drowsy grasses softly bend and nod,
And Jack forever in his pulpit stands
And prates his silent sermon to the glen;
The sweeping, crushing winds that bluster when
The Storm God holds all living in his hands.
I love it all, because in it I see,
Not wild, but human nature bared to me.

EPITAPH

One of the world's great quiet ones who choose
In placid observation long to dwell,
Rather to love all things than preach a few,
To trust in beauty and hold beauty true;
Rather to die unnamed than named too well,
To love them all than to pursue one muse.
His heart was like a never-filling bowl:
Sensing the joys around him everywhere,
You never saw him in misfortune weep.
If in his veiling eyes you looked too deep,
You'd find a tear forever waiting there,
But never poured except into his soul.
Those who knew him mourned his failure. He
Loved them well and that was victory.

TO C——

Oh, touch no longer known, oh muted heap
Of little things that every day you did,
Over and over, always just the same.
Your voice, the thrilling song you made my name
(Whispered and wondrous as a thing forbid)
Gone and remembered these and will not sleep.

Again I hear you, see you, feel anew
The casual meeting of your eyes and mine;
The sweeping storm of glories in your walk,
The way that once we mused in quiet talk
Of beauty, while I sipped yours in like wine,
And wandered as in spring the winter through.

So quick you passed, you could not hear the song,
You taught my love to sing so clear and strong.

SONG OF THE FALTERER

What matters it, my son—and if these men
Will not believe you—call you “dreamer,—fool—”
Why, let them call—they temper but your steel.
The coldness of their hearts will make it hard,
And hard and true ’t must be to pierce their souls.

And truth must daily die a thousand deaths,
If but to kill the knaves who would truth slay.
Do you remember that oft quoted line—
“Truth crushed to earth will rise again”?—Should say
Truth crushed to earth begets a thousand swords
To smite her enemies. Come, raise your head,
It does not suit an Atlas thus to mope
With such great worlds awaiting his strong arms.
What? hurts you? so I hope—

So do all nectars sting before the throat,
Accustoms faintness to a noble touch.

Not so long since I felt as do you,
Unwilling to expose my heart to these
Encircling gnats whose weapon is—their scorn.
In modesty I covered up my wounds.

And so, I yielded—but you must not yield.
Too late, I learned the inner sword which cuts

My heart is sharper than all theirs in one.
Go on, and on,
The ashes of my flame shall kindle yours.
Ah, never fail me—puny shaftlets make
But tiny scratches on a noble soul,
Through which the blood comes dripping, making great
Whate'er it touches. Laugh with me, my son,
And if the world should scorn us, we'll forgive it.
Life's not the big thing, but the way men live it.

THE SIMIAN AND THE LADY

Once
At the house
Of a most noble
Manchu
(A prince of an ancient line who dwelt in a blue porcelain
palace in the Walled Forbidden City of Peking)
I saw
A great Ape.
The ape was chained.
But he grinned;
Nothing else.
When he could,
If he had thought about the matter,
Have broken the chain
That held him captive,
And escaped—
But of course,
He did not.

Once
At the house
Of a most noble
Manchu
(A Prince of an ancient line who dwelt in a blue porcelain
palace in the Walled Forbidden City of Peking)
I saw
A great Lady,

And she grinned,
Nothing else,
When she could,
If she had thought about the matter,
Have broken the chain
Of convention
That held her captive,
And escaped—
But of course
She did not.

The Lady was Poetry.
How like the Ape she was.

TRINITY

Women are cheap, and wine is easy,
But, oh, my love had a bitter price.
Steel is steel when it comes from the fire,
Birth, death, and denial, they molded me thrice.

Birth was the sight of her, casual and smiling,
Leaning in loveliness over her wall,
Touching my eyes with the grace of her glory,
Feeding the love that was born at her call.

Death was the sight of her, casual and smiling,
Lying in loveliness there by my side;
She that my soul loved, paying my body,
For she was a harlot, and so my love died.

Denial the sight of her, casual and smiling,
Leaning in loveliness over her wall;
And I passed her by with a laugh and a gesture,
Reborn was my love when I passed at her call.

Women are cheap, and wine is easy,
But, oh, my love had a bitter price,
Steel is steel when it comes from the fire,
Birth, death, and denial, they molded me thrice.

FLIGHT

A golden bird once passed me on the wing,
To meet his love who waited for his song.
He sang and sang as he did pass me by.
The echo of his voice trilled long and long.

Yet I could not repeat his lay, although
He sang and sang as he did pass me by;
So beautiful his notes and yet so sad,
They sounded like a God's poor lovelorn sigh.

He sang and sang as he did pass me by,
And yet I understood not any note,
Because the golden bird was Poetry,
At whose dictation Love and Genius wrote.

Oh, let me understand the song you sing,
So quickly past me do not haste to fly;
But though long time I followed, coaxed the bird,
He sang and sang, but still did pass me by.

LEGEND OF THE MARTYRS

Men do not die for Faith or God, but for themselves;
Grasping in one moment all they sought for, failed to
 find in life,
And that is Death.

WE WHO ARE ABOUT TO DIE

When I visited the death cell,
Saw the grim and shrinking pale one there before me,
Locked now in steel before the Event, would be wrapped
 and enclosed again after the last great moment;
I was afraid and disheartened;
Knowing that we, even his keepers and guards are under
 the same gray sentence.
He today, we tomorrow, or the day after—even today
 perhaps—
There is always time for another in one day.
But the prisoner said, and looked at me strangely, madly
 to say it,
(He was a highwayman, this prisoner, having murdered a
 bank clerk for money)
“Aw Hell, Mister—Aw Hell, Mister—don’t be so damn
 sorry for yourself.”

ABOUT OVERCOATS

Overcoats are like manners,
Easily slipping on or off, at will
Thrown over the arm or stored away,
Concealing nearly everything beneath;
Warming and protecting if of standard texture;
And, too, they come in every quality.

ENGAGED

The girl I love is yesterday's you,
Not the lady you will be tomorrow.
Yesterday's moment was laughing and true,
Today is the mother of sorrow.

Yesterday's love was unthinking and free,
Today's is a dull calculation.
How many rooms in a dwelling for three?
And how far is it from the station?

What kind of car can we keep? How divine
To belong to a Cultural Group,
How much for teas and for theatres and wine?
How many noodles in soup?

The girl I love is yesterday's you,
Not the lady you will be tomorrow.
Yesterday's moment was laughing and true,
Today is the mother of sorrow.

THE MERRY HA-HA

Once, for a little while they loved;
While the winds were stilled,
And the sun burned not,
And the high heart of Heaven laughed.

And after a little while they died;
While the winds blew,
And the sun burned red,
And the high heart of Heaven laughed.

IN A DARK CORNER

Be calm, my Love, my Winter Love, be calm,
Before the Spring shall make us fools once more,
And make us dream again that when we love,
We go not as all lovers went before.

Ah, we are nothing new and this our love
Will only older lovers' ways embalm;
And so, though in the Spring we will forget,
Be calm, my Love, my Winter Love, be calm.

SONG FOR A JUDGMENT DAY AND FOR A LADY

If all things but one must go,
Under the unheeding, quiet, endless evening—
Return to the inert, uncolored formlessness they sprang
from—
Let you be the one of all these, be the sole remainder and
reminder.

For me, I want no immortality for this crudeness, this
foolish clay—
Too long already have I dawdled between these two Eter-
nities that bound me.
But if the mountains and the brooks and the oceans and
the forests all must perish,
And I must perish too, miserably, as I came;
Be the one remaining, oh my lover—
For out of you, out of you will all these glories come
anew—
The mountains and the brooks and the oceans and the
forests,
And because all things will be descended then from you,
Ugliness, ugliness alone will have gone from the world
and have died.

BIOLOGY NOTE

The newly escaped butterfly,
Having but a moment ago departed from the cocoon,
Observing a worm crawling beneath it upon the ground,
Eyes it a trifle disdainfully and says—
“Oh nasty, dirty worm, don’t you perceive
That worms are out of place in a butterfly’s garden?”

But the worm, crawling along the ground in wormlike
fashion,
Looks up at the butterfly hovering lovely above him,
Turns (as worms will do) to a caterpillar crawling beside
him and says—
“Nevertheless” and “Nevertheless!”—

And in America there are no worms—
Only caterpillars.

SONG OF THE OLD ONE

Journeying homeward, journeying homeward under the
cold stars,
Alone and wind wrapped and draped in a blanket of
darkness,
The path sang and the wind sang and the world sang and
I sang too;
Out of me came a voice, out from my being it trembled,
invoking the Old One.

“Oh sea, oh ancient steadfast lover of the shore,
Changing and changeless, faithful and faithless,
Impassioned a million years, fearless, unmoral;
Destroyer, creator, defiant, complacent, ocean untamable,
Hail!
I all alone, standing here on the rocks at high tide on
an evening in April,
No companion beside me, no hand touching mine, no
friend and no lover;
While the moon like a memory of winter shows coldly
above me,
The rocks like a mourning song sounding below me, be-
neath me,
Sounding in trumpets of loneliness, ghastly and hollow—
And I, unafraid and undaunted, alone here and questing—
Questing an answer, a spirit, a soul or a lover—
Questing as you do, deathless as you are, flowing and fluid,
ocean untamable,

Hail!"

But journeying homeward, journeying homeward under
the cold stars,
Alone and wind wrapped and draped in a blanket of
darkness,
Though the path sang and the wind sang and the world
sang and I sang too,
Out of the sea came a voice, out from its being it trembled,
the voice of the Old One;
Beating in fierce exultation the rocks with their trumpets
of loneliness,
Beating with terrible harshness the shore with a tympanic
sureness.

"Death—Death—Death—Death—
Death for all but the ocean untamable—
Hail!"

ON OPENING A VERY OLD BOOK

Seething javelins of flame lie close and hidden through the
ages,

Buried deep, but brilliant flashing in their armories of
paper,

Smoldering, somnolently waiting, biding restful till a man
shall

Open wide the storehouse gates and bare his breast to fiery
thrustings.

Now they sleep, but only dozing gather strength to scorch
his heart out—

With their leaping, mocking flame to draw his fire out and
upward—

Pulling him in one shocked instant through and from a
lovely heaven.

Oh book, I open wide your long closed doors, defenseless
bare my heart—

Let fly your flames, perhaps some tiny spark will fall and
kindle high

An instant's fire to be alone for me a lasting Paradise.

TO THE GREAT POET WHO WILL COME

What matter if my verses turn to wind-blown dust too soon;

What matter if no echo pipe my penny-whistle tune?

The song is mine, I made it, while it lives I'll love it well.

But I will not grudge my leaden when I hear your golden bell.

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